

# Traffic Safety— What for the Future?

ALBERT E. HUBER, Executive Director  
Indiana Traffic Safety Foundation

It might be of interest to review the current status of traffic safety before attempting to look into the future, and to develop at least partial answers to the following questions:

What is being done in traffic safety?

What accomplishments, if any, have been made in this field?

What's new in traffic safety?

Why are traffic safety programs weak or failing?

Where can the traffic engineer assist?

First, what is being done in traffic safety? In my travels, I see the benefits of the application of the techniques of your particular profession. In many of the communities I visit, there are very evident improvements in the movement of traffic. This may well be an indication of increasing recognition by officials and citizens of the need for professional guidance in making plans to cope with the traffic problem. We begin to see evidence of the long discussed and long awaited expansion of the interstate system. In Indiana, we can now travel on sections of this new system of super highways. Travelways of this kind, we know, will have a beneficial effect upon traffic safety; but our enthusiasm is tempered somewhat by the fact that authorities tell us that even when completed, the interstate system will carry only 20 per cent of our total travel. This emphasizes the need for greater recognition of the importance of improving secondary and urban street systems.

In the vehicular field we note some improvement in safety design and structural engineering of the automobile. Continued improvement is promised by the motor car manufacturers as more reliable accident information is available. Certainly much can be accomplished in safety by continuing improvements of such basic features as steering, brakes, lights, visibility instruments and controls.

With respect to the driver, we see continued but very slow progress in the expansion of driver education. This important phase

of traffic safety has very obviously suffered a slow down by the recent emphasis, particularly in our secondary schools, on the need for training scientists in an effort to maintain our world position. We see only painstakingly slow application of known methods of raising the level of driver ability through the driver licensing procedure. So, in answer to "what is being done" in the general field of traffic safety, it might be summed up by saying progress is being made but at an exceedingly slow and costly pace. There remains an almost nationwide reluctance to accept the need for a full application of known and proven techniques to reduce traffic accident losses.

What is our present position in traffic safety? There are some encouraging accomplishments in this field. In the few states and cities where better than average acceptance of a full-fledged traffic safety program has been won, the results are encouraging. We see these same states recording additional gains year after year. For example, Connecticut, Maine and Virginia were among the 17 states having reductions in traffic fatalities last year in the face of a general upward trend in highway losses. Indiana contributed to this upward trend with a seven per cent increase in traffic fatalities. Among our larger Hoosier cities, South Bend, Gary and Hammond accomplished reductions in traffic deaths. Fort Wayne and Indianapolis suffered numerical increases in traffic deaths, largely from multiple death crashes, but both cities maintained very vigorous accident prevention programs. Overall, the most optimistic state and national summary would be that we are "holding the line." In spite of the fact that in 1959 our national highway losses nudged 38,000 deaths and a million and a half disabling injuries, annual traffic losses have been held below the 1941 peak of nearly 40,000 deaths. Added encouragement comes from the fact that this holding of the line has been accomplished in the face of almost unbelievable increases in all factors contributing to the problem. I'm sure even the wildest prophet in 1947 would hardly have dared to predict the present national totals of 177 million people and over 70 million motor cars contributing to annual highway travel of nearly 700 billion miles. Steadily year by year the national mileage death rate experience has declined from 18 in 1925 to 5.4 deaths per 100 million miles of travel in each of the past two years. This, by the way, is the only statistic from which we can take encouragement.

What's new in traffic safety which may effect future trends or activities? In addition to the immense highway construction program (in which it was interesting to note that traffic safety was used

repeatedly as justification), we have several other interesting developments in traffic safety at the national level. Transportation safety has at long last come of age in Congress. It has actually achieved organizational status and power within the congressional committee structure. The Roberts Sub-committee on Traffic Safety, which was a special committee prior to 1959, is now a standing committee on Health and Safety with broad jurisdiction and authority. Congressman Roberts, vigorous chairman of this committee, has introduced numerous bills involving traffic safety, but at least four major projects of his committee indicate its aggressive search for solutions to the traffic problem:

1. Legislation to establish minimum safety standards for passenger carrying vehicles purchased for government use.

2. A plea to place more emphasis on driver education "to combat lawlessness which contributes to juvenile delinquency," and to reduce the accident toll in the age bracket where casualties are heaviest.

3. Stresses the urgent need for the adoption of uniform driving rules to apply from coast to coast.

4. Urges more be spent on traffic research. Congressman Roberts states, "that only by research have we made progress against mass killers in public health problems, and in traffic we are dealing with one of the major public health problems of our time."

Rather than attempt to point the finger at the failings or weaknesses of our present state-wide traffic safety effort, I would prefer to list some of the areas where it seems apparent we need to concentrate our greatest thought and effort.

1. There exists an urgent need for continued improvement of traffic law enforcement and its removal from the influence of local politics. We must eventually establish it as a technical or professional function in order to establish continuity of effort.

2. We must continue to improve laws governing driving and walking. We're still permitting too many unqualified people to drive. Very few Hoosier communities have even a basic pedestrian program.

3. We must further intensify our present efforts to improve our primary and secondary rural roads through the scientific elimination of bottlenecks and hazards. The plight of most county road systems is deplorable.

4. Extend improved highway lighting.
5. Give greater emphasis to the elimination of physical environment under which accidents take place.
6. Increase the use of proven techniques in resolving traffic problems—accidents and congestion.
7. There is an urgent need to spend more money on research—(a) highway construction; (b) driver behavior and control; and (c) safety engineering of the vehicle.
8. Must develop greater interest and support for these and other necessary activities through the formation of a larger number of adequately staffed, properly financed, citizen safety organizations.

Some of these needs you wrestle with every day in your own area of responsibility. But some of the others have a tremendous bearing on the success or failure of your engineering accomplishments. I cite only two: (1) enforcement or supervision; and (2) driver ability.

There is general acceptance of the fact our public officials have the primary responsibility for traffic safety. There is also growing recognition that it is equally important to have the active support of business and citizen organizations in any serious effort to undertake a full scale approach to the traffic problem.

This dual approach is the basis for the formation of state and community safety organizations. With proper representation and resources, a safety organization can conduct continuous informational and educational activities alerting a state or community of its traffic safety needs and developing understanding and acceptance of the official efforts to satisfy these needs.

At the national level, there are a number of groups actively interested in traffic safety; but the two which are most directly involved, and the most effective in the traffic accident prevention field, are the A.A.A. and the National Safety Council. The A.A.A. makes tremendous contributions in pedestrian safety, driver education and school safety.

The National Safety Council carries on a vigorous and continuing effort to encourage activity in safety of all types, but in traffic safety it sponsors a direct service to states and cities through its annual inventory of traffic safety activities program. This is a service which helps states and cities appraise their own traffic situations and develop more effective programs to prevent accidents, facilitate movement and reduce congestion. The inventory program is also a means of accumu-

lating valuable information for numerous other recognized safety activities and organizations.

One very important section of the inventory, both for states and cities, is on traffic engineering. This service is possible through the cooperation of your Institute of Traffic Engineers. The traffic engineering analysis, and the award program your institute conducts in cooperation with the National Safety Council, are a tremendous contribution to state and local traffic programs.

The National Safety Council provides the mechanics for bringing together, at the national level, the strength and facilities of many professions and organizations for a concerted effort in accident prevention, and works ceaselessly to develop essential business and industrial support for the safety effort.

The Indiana Traffic Safety Foundation was organized to serve a similar role at the state level in traffic safety. We are not a multi-purpose safety organization.

The foundation was formed following one of the National Conferences in Washington, D. C. sponsored by the President's Committee for Traffic Safety. The President's Committee for Traffic Safety is made up of some of the top business leaders in the nation and its most outstanding contribution to the traffic safety effort is the very comprehensive action program which defines the varied activities essential to a well balanced traffic safety effort at the state and local levels. The action program is the product of many years work by some of the best traffic safety minds in the nation.

Our primary objective is to obtain full application of the action program in Indiana. To work for, urge and assist, at the state and local level, the application of those techniques which have proven effective in traffic accident prevention.

Second, we are interested in the formation of local citizen safety organizations, because the most direct need for action is at the local level. With organized support groups active in many communities, we could begin to mobilize the interest and public demand for some of the things needed in legislation and other state-wide activities.

Let's just review some of the objectives of a local safety council:

1. To build and maintain in minds of the people in a community an understanding of the accident and associated problem.
2. To create an awareness of personal responsibility for safety.
3. Work to facilitate, as well as safeguard, the free flow of traffic, because the two major aspects of the traffic problem, accidents and congestion, have common causes.

4. To work closely and cooperate with governmental and other responsible groups, to build sound accident prevention programs.

5. To focus community attention on the principal community traffic needs and generate public opinion in support of the necessary action to meet these needs.

6. To provide the means for voluntary coordination planning and execution of community traffic plans.

7. To provide continuity to effective accident prevention programs.

8. To recognize that many accident and traffic problems cannot be resolved by action confined to the community's political boundaries; thus, it is necessary to join with state and national organizations in the accomplishment of some of the major needs.

9. To seek adoption of uniform methods of traffic control and accident prevention.

It has been said that every community with a traffic problem should have a community safety organization. This statement may be a little broad in scope, but certainly a truly successful approach to the traffic safety problem must involve continuing citizen support for sincere official action.

Our major weakness in traffic safety is the lack of adequate organization. There are too few local safety councils in Indiana; too meager support for an effective state-wide safety organization.

What success the future may hold will be determined largely by our ability to develop strong, continuing safety organizations at the state and local level.

This presents your profession with a challenge and an opportunity. First, if a safety organization exists in your community, make certain you are familiar with its people and program. Accept opportunities to raise the level of understanding of the membership of this organization in matters concerning traffic engineering, its basic principles and the benefits it offers.

If a safety organization does not exist in the community in which you live, I would urge you to assume leadership in forming one.

It has been demonstrated that the traffic problem can be brought under control if public officials provide the leadership, and are backed by strong citizen support for the measures needed to achieve this end.

Unless we develop a more intensive effort, and a much better coordinated traffic safety effort, we may find that with the tremendous increases in travel predicted, we are unable to hold traffic losses in check. We may very easily begin to lose ground and be faced with rapidly rising losses of life and property.

Should these increases occur, they might well be charged to the very improvements in traffic operation which you are now making, and we will find mounting agitation and support for slow speeds, maximum control, prevent-movement types of programs which you have been struggling to break away from.

The challenge is here; the opportunity exists to accomplish very real and lasting gains in traffic safety if we are able to bring about a high degree of organized effort. The methods of accident prevention are well advanced. The urgent need now is for more extensive application of these known techniques.

The problem is summed up very well in this closing statement of a recent report of the President's committee:

"With conscientious application of the action program by public officials in all states and communities, and with organized public support for this official action, the people of this Nation can avoid paying, each year, so high and needless a cost for traffic accidents. By these means, our streets and highways can be safer channels of efficient traffic movement; without them, they will be corridors of death and chaos."